

A Guide to Judo and to Watching a Judo Contest

What is Judo?

Judo is a system of self defense, a physical and mental discipline, and an Olympic Sport. Judo was founded in 1882, in Japan, by Professor Jigoro Kano, who envisioned it as a way of becoming physically and mentally fit through disciplined training. It is designed so that it can be practiced by all ages, both male and female. Judo is safe and does not involve any kicking or striking techniques. It is an excellent activity to increase physical fitness, self-esteem and self-defense.

USA Judo is the National Governing Body for the sport of Judo in the United States. It is a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee, the Pan American Judo Union, and the International Judo Federation (IJF). USA Judo establishes rules for all sanctioned Judo events, conducts National and International Championships, selects members of International Teams, certifies Referees and Officials and promotes the sport in the United States.

The Way of Judo

Judo is sometimes called "The Gentle Way." This means that sometimes victory can be obtained by giving way, rather than by pitting force against force. An example is sometimes given that a small flexible tree will bend and survive in a hurricane, whereas a much stronger, stiffer tree will snap in two. Similarly, in Judo, a person who can't possibly be as strong as his opponent because of a difference in size, can still come out ahead by using quickness, cunning, and superior technique to get the opponent off balance and then immediately taking the advantage and applying a throwing technique. Of course, the smaller player must train diligently in order to be as quick, fast, strong and smart as possible for his or her size. In Judo, we learn that nobody can be perfect at everything, but through training, you can discover your weaknesses and overcome them, and also realize your limitations and devise ways of being successful, in spite of these. These kind of lessons can be applied in all aspects of life, including school, work, and in personal relationships.

How is Judo Practiced?

Judo is generally practiced in two ways: kata, or prearranged, formal demonstration of technique, and randori, or free practice (sparring). Competition, called shiai, is usually in the form of randori, but kata competitions are also held. Olympic Judo is Randori-style competition only.

First and foremost, Judo is practiced with safety in mind. Students are taught methods of falling on a resilient (but not soft) mat without getting injured. Flexibility, stretching and strength exercises are part of every Judo practice.

A Brief History of Judo Competition

In 1948, the first World Championships for men were held. Currently, World Championships for Men and Women are held in odd-numbered years; Junior World Championships for men and women under 20 years of age are held in even-numbered years. In 1964, Men's Judo was included in the Olympic Games. In 1988 Women's Judo was a demonstration event and in 1992 became a full medal event in the Olympics. Every year, USA Judo holds National Championships for Adults (minimum of 15 years old), Youth (under 20 years old), and Masters (30 years old and above.)

Watching a Contest

So, you're at the judo tournament. What the heck is going on? Hopefully the following will be an easy introduction to the rules, and will help you to understand the tournament.

What are they trying to do?

Quite simply they are trying to:

- ❑ Knock the opponent over so that s/he lands hard on the back (a throw); or
- ❑ Hold the opponent on the back for 25 seconds; or
- ❑ Make the opponent submit by a strangle (choke) or an armlock.

If any of those three things is done successfully the score given is called "Ippon" and the match is over, like a knockout in boxing or a pin in wrestling.

How Do They Hope to Do It?

There are hundreds of variations of throwing techniques. Some throws use mostly legs, some mostly arms, some a combination of arms, legs, and torso. Some throw their opponent over their own hips, shoulder, or back. They can also sweep the opponent's feet out from under him, or they can drop down and throw the opponent over their own fallen body.

To pin the opponent, they press down from a face-down or side-down position on the opponent (generally controlling the head and an arm or leg) so that the opponent's back or a shoulder is on the mat.

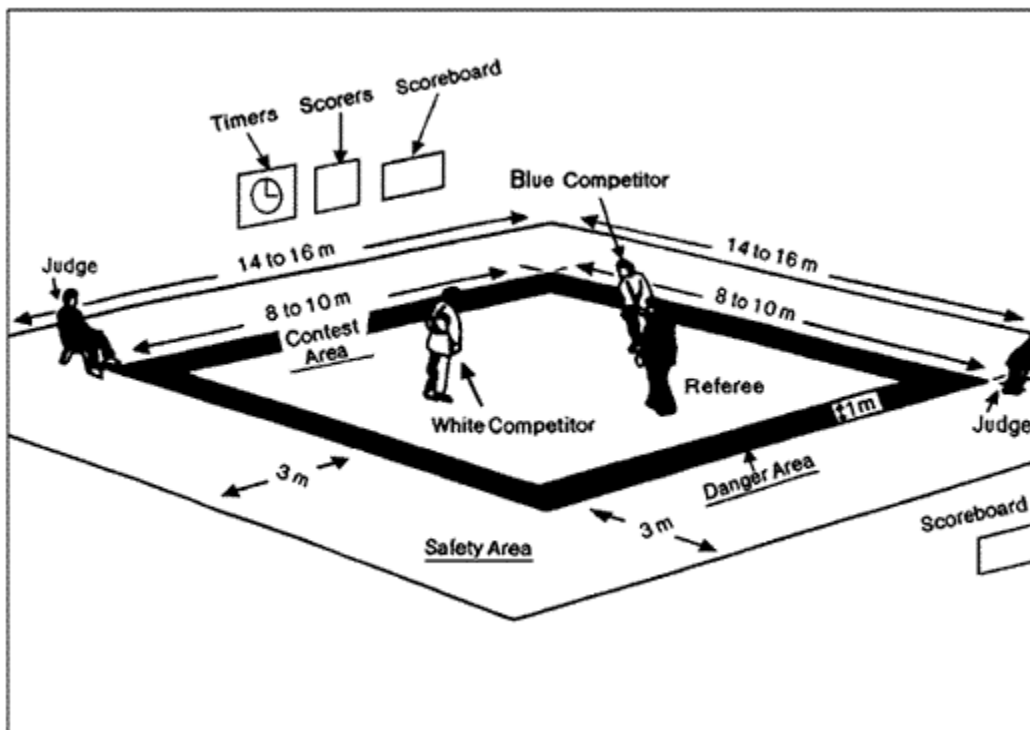
To obtain a submission, pressure can be applied directly on the elbow of a straight arm, or the arm bent at a right angle can be twisted in either direction (armlock). To strangle, or choke, pressure is applied to the sides of the opponent's neck (not the windpipe) by one or both forearms or by using the opponent's own collar. Strangle holds are only allowed on players 13 years old or older. Arm locks can only be used if the player is at least 17 years old.

Although strangles and arm locks may seem dangerous, the players are trained to know when they are in danger, and will submit by tapping either the mat, or the opponent, twice, before any damage is done. The referees are extremely alert when one player attempts to apply a choke or an armlock. If the referee thinks the technique is about to cause serious injury, he can stop the match and declare a winner.

Who Decides?

The degree of success for all techniques is determined by three referees. Two sit at opposite corners and the third moves around the mat to observe the players. The center referee also controls the bout and signals the results. But make no mistake, each decision is agreed upon by at least two of the three or it is changed.

Below is a sketch of a contest area. For identification, one player will wear a completely blue uniform (Judo-gi, or Judo clothing); the other will wear a white Judo-gi. The contest area is a square 8 x 8 meters on a side. The outer meter ("danger area") is red and is inside the playing area, but competitors can only remain in that area for a few seconds before attempting a throw or they will be penalized. There is a 3-meter "safety area" in which players can be thrown as long as the thrower remains inside the contest area.



Are There Partial Scores?

Yes, for throws and pins. Naturally on submissions it is either success or failure. In each bout, however, it is the highest **quality** score that wins; they have to equal in quality before number is taken into account. With throws, partial scores are given if the opponent does not land largely on the back, or not hard or fast enough, but still have some of the required qualities. Pins broken before 25 seconds, but after 10 seconds are awarded partial points.

How Can You Tell a Technique's Score?

Watch the center referee's hand signal and listen to the call. The higher the signaling arm, the higher the score. The scores, in order from highest to lowest quality, are:

Ippon: arm straight up.

Waza-ari: arm out at shoulder level

Yuko: arm 45 degrees out from the side

Koka: arm against the side; hand in a sort of stop or greeting signal

Who is Ahead?

There should be one or two scoreboards to show the state of play. Because in Judo it is always the highest quality score that wins, the scoreboard is laid out left to right to show the scores like three-digit numbers:

	Waza-Ari	Yuko	Koka	Medical
	Keikoku	Chui	Shido	
BLUE	0	3	1	++
WHITE	1	0	0	+
	Keikoku	<u>Chui</u>	Shido	

Looked at in this way, the score is 100 to 31: White's single waza-ari beats the lesser quality of Blue's three yukos and one koka. Other features of the scoreboard are as follows:

1. The Ippon score is not shown on the scoreboard because there can only be one Ippon and scoring it ends the bout.
2. If two waza-ari's are scored by the same person it is considered the same as an Ippon and the match ends.
3. On the above scoreboard, Blue has two medical timeouts; White has one. If blue needs another medical timeout, the match will end and white will be declared the winner.
4. The underlined Chui on the White side indicates that one of Blue's Yukos was as a result of White's Chui penalty. If White received another penalty, the Chui would be removed and the Keikoku would appear underlined; on the Blue side, one Yuko would be removed and a Waza-Ari would be added. Penalties are explained in more detail in the next section.
5. If an Ippon has not been scored by the end of the time limit, the player with the highest score wins; if tied, the referee (1) and judges (2) decide who is the winner using a majority decision. They will each hold a blue flag in one hand and white flag in the other. On the referee's command of "HANTEI" (HAHN-TAY), each will indicate their vote by raising the flag having the same color of the uniform of the winner.

What Aren't They Allowed to Do?

There is a long list of things not allowed. Mainly, players are expected to play fair and continuously attack. They will be penalized for things like intentionally going out of bounds, refusing to attack (stalling), being too defensive, making rude comments or gestures, and performing dangerous acts (like not giving the opponent a chance to submit). The rules are rarely broken except in the tactical areas, such as stepping out or stalling. Penalties in judo are severe; a repeat of any transgression results always in the next higher penalty, the lower one being removed. The equivalent score is given to the opponent. Again, listen to the referee. The four possible signals, lowest to highest:

Shido: Koka to opponent

Chui: Yuko to the opponent

Keikoku: Waza-ari to the opponent

Hansoku-make: Ippon to the opponent

Because of the escalation of penalties, only four minor transgressions will result in **Hansoku-make** (disqualification).

Did You Know?

- ❑ Judo is the most widely practiced martial art on the planet.
- ❑ Judo is the second most practiced sport worldwide (Soccer is #1).
- ❑ According to the American College of Sports Medicine, Judo is the safest contact sport for children under age 13.
- ❑ U.S. Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell was captain of the 1964 Olympic Judo Team.
- ❑ WWF Wrestler "Bad News Brown" is Allen Coage, 1976 Olympic Bronze Medallist.
- ❑ Actress Hillary Wolf (Home Alone I & II) is a 1996 Olympian ranked #1 in the USA.
- ❑ Theodore Roosevelt became a brown belt in Judo during his administration and actor James Cagney was a black belt in Judo.